



# Ephesians Core Group Study

The book of Ephesians moves from theory to practice; from doctrine to duty; from what God has done to what we are to do. In this study we will go along on the journey to find out how as Christians we are to live, and who we are to be as redeemed people living out our faith in this world.

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## Overview of the Book

### About the city of Ephesus

Ephesus was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. It was a port city, so it had become a center for international trade. Many people would come in and out. It was also the home to the Temple of Artemis (or Diana) which was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was also the home of a Greek theatre/stadium, which could hold up to 50,000 people.

### The Church in Ephesus

The beginning of the church in Ephesus is detailed in Acts 19. Read Acts 19:8–20 for context. The church was planted by Paul on his 3rd missionary journey. He spent over 2 years there and was extremely effective and controversial. It is considered one of the biggest revivals of all time. During Paul's ministry there, extraordinary and miraculous things happened - the sick were cured, demons were cast out, converted pagans burned their books of magic. Eventually a riot broke out in Ephesus over Paul and his ministry because it was hurting the business of the local cults.

### Ephesians

This letter was written by Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit while Paul was in jail. This letter is one of the only Epistles, if not the only Epistle, that was written without a specific situation in mind. It is believed that it was written as a circular letter intended to be read widely by all the churches in Asia Minor.



### General Outline

	<b>Section 1 Ch. 1-3</b>	<b>Section 2 Ch. 4-6</b>
<b>Focus</b>	Doctrine	Ethics
<b>Style</b>	Preaching	Teaching
<b>Topics</b>	The new life in a new society	The new standards and the new relationships
<b>Tone</b>	These are the facts of our new situation	This is what we must do in light of this new reality
<b>Concern</b>	The Christian faith	The Christian life

Again, theory to practice; doctrine to duty; what God has done to what we are to do.





# Week One: Ephesians 1:1-23

What We Have “In Him”

## Background

How quickly we forget what is ours when we become followers of Jesus. We tend to look at the trees that are directly in front of us instead of stepping back and looking at the whole forest. Paul delighted in reminding the believers about the spiritual blessings that were theirs because they belonged to Christ.

**Read Ephesians 1:3-14.**

## Text Questions

1. According to verses 3–6 what blessings are ours from the Father?
2. What blessings, according to verses 7–12 do we have in Christ?
3. What blessings do we receive through the Holy Spirit (vs. 13–14)?
4. Three important word pictures in this passage:
  - a. *Adoption* - this was a common Roman (but not Jewish) custom in which a child was given *all* the rights of the adoptive family by grace, not by merit or birth.
  - b. *Redemption* - the setting free of prisoners or slaves by payment of a ransom (in this case, Jesus' death in place of the sinner).
  - c. *Seal* - a mark placed by an owner on a package, a cow, a slave, etc. It is also like a king used to put his seal or insignia on a letter showing that it was from the king. In the Old Testament, this seal was circumcision for Yahweh's people and today the Holy Spirit is our seal.
  - d. Which of these is most significant to you and why?

## Interpretation Questions

1. Notice the repeated phrase, “to the praise of His glory” in verse 5–6, 12, 14. What do you think it means to live “to the praise of His glory”?
2. How does your life need to change so that you are living to the praise of God's glory?

**Read Ephesians 1:15-23.**

## Text Questions

1. What are the three things that Paul specifically prays that the church would know about their salvation?
  - a. The hope to which they have been called from the **past** in which they used to live - God called us out of something (death) into the eternal kind of life!
  - b. The glorious inheritance of the saints or their **future** - inheritance in heaven.
  - c. His incomparably great power for those who believe in the **present** - power for today.

## Interpretation Questions



1. "For this reason....I have not stopped giving thanks for you": what do you think the "reason" is?
  - a. He knew the fullness of what they had received when they were saved - all the spiritual blessings we just talked about - and that caused him to give thanks!
2. Why would the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation (vs. 17) help the Ephesians to know God better?
  - a. God uses the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself to us further and there are certain things we just can't know naturally, but they are revelations (like Jesus being the Son of God); we need God to give us revelation, even as we read Scripture. The Spirit is our counselor and teacher.
  - b. The whole Christian life is summed up here, to know and experience God more fully.
3. Why is the resurrection and ascension such a vivid demonstration of divine power?
  - a. God can take the dead, something that was previously irreversible, and give them life again, physically and spiritually. If he can do that, He can do anything.

### **Application**

Pair up with someone else and pray for them that God would: 1) give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Him better, 2) would open the eyes of their heart so they might realize the hope to which they have been called, the glorious inheritance that awaits them, and the power they have to live today! Pray this for that person throughout the week.





# Week Two: Ephesians 2:1-10

Our Heavenly Makeover

## Opening Questions

1. What's the best gift that you have ever received?
2. What do you think your life would be like right now if you had not become a Christian? (If you ask this, rephrase it if there are non-believers in your group.)

## Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

## Text Questions

1. How does this text describe the condition of fallen humanity?
  - a. Dead in transgressions and sins: in what ways do you see this in those who are not following Jesus?
  - b. Under the rule of the kingdom of the air: those who are not redeemed off the slave block (as last week's lesson talked about) are still enslaved to this ruler.
  - c. Objects of wrath. What does this mean?
2. In contrast to the desperate fallen condition of human beings, what has God done for us?
  - a. What does it mean to be made alive in Christ? We are regenerated—we now have a different Spirit at work in us—the Holy Spirit.
  - b. What does it mean that we are seated with Christ in the Heavenly realms? We are seated in a place of authority (the right hand of God means a place of authority more than a physical location). We now have authority over the ruler of the air because we are allied with God. It is also a place of blessing. We go from being objects of wrath to objects of blessing.
3. What was God's motive in making us alive (vs. 4)?
4. According to verses 8-9, by what means does salvation come?

## Interpretation Questions

1. What does grace mean? How would you define grace?
  - a. God's riches at Christ's expense
  - b. God's unmerited favor
  - c. Getting something that we don't deserve, whereas mercy indicates *not* getting what we *do* deserve
  - d. Phillip Yancey: "There is nothing we can do to make God love us more; there is nothing we can do to make God love us less."
  - e. Grace is what separates Christianity from other world religions.
2. How do we receive this grace?
  - a. By faith. What is faith, really? Putting the full weight of your trust in Jesus, not just intellectually assenting to belief in him.
3. What is the relationship between grace and good works?



- a. Though good works do not save, they do flow out from us as a result of salvation. There is a big difference between being a result versus the cause!
- 4. Why can't man be saved by good works or by his own acts of goodness?
  - a. Salvation means reunion with a holy God. We, by nature, are children of wrath and deserving of death, and simply doing good things cannot make the dead alive or the unrighteous righteous.
- 5. What is the key to fulfilling our destiny according to verse 10?

### **Application**

- 1. What good works do you personally feel God may have in mind for you? (Not just in the future but even now while at college.)
- 2. What has hindered you from these? What changes can you make this week to live as God would have you to, fulfilling His purposes for you at UVA?





# Week Three: Ephesians 2:11-3:21

The Church

## Background

Some second-generation Christian Gentiles were forgetting what life was like before their conversion to Christ. Before conversion, they were separated from Christ with no expectation for Him to light up their darkness. They had no citizenship in His kingdom, lived devoid of hope, and were ignorant of God with no belief in Him.

In their redeemed state, they were brought near God through atonement. He Himself became their peace, their wholeness, bringing together previously hostile groups by the Spirit. We too now share the same privileges of God's people as fellow citizens.

## Read Ephesians 2:11-22.

## Text Questions

1. According to verses 11-12, what was the situation between the Jews and Gentiles before Jesus?
2. In verses 1-10, we see how Christ reconciles us to God. In these verses, what other type of reconciliation happens through Christ?
  - a. To one another.
3. How do the images Paul uses in verses 19-22 emphasize the unity Christians have with one another?
4. What does it mean to be a fellow citizen?
  - a. Talk about the different images that Paul uses. What does that show us about the nature of Kingdom citizenship?

## Interpretation Questions

1. What adjectives come to mind when you think about the church?
2. Where would Christianity be today if it weren't for the church?
3. What does the word "church" really mean?
  - a. Go back to the background information. The church in Greek literally means "called out ones" - called out of darkness and into light, out of inaction and into action for God's Kingdom
4. What dividing wall in our world would you most like to see come down?
5. What qualities should we possess as Christians to make reconciliation possible?
  - a. Grace, forgiveness, and compassion.



6. What could it look like for God to knock down walls between people to do a work of reconciliation?

**Read Ephesians 3:1-13.**

**Text Questions**

1. According to verses 10-11, what purposes does God have for the church?
2. What is Paul's attitude toward the church?
  - a. Think about having faith in community versus a personal faith devoid of the influence of others. Which would Paul think is better?
3. What is the significance of Paul's reference to experiencing the love of Christ "together with all the saints"?
  - a. Christ's love cannot be known in isolation; one cannot be loved if one is completely and utterly alone and unknown.

**Application**

Think about your interpersonal relationships. How has being reconciled to God affected them? How can you live differently this week in regards to your relationships to display God's reconciliation (of us to Himself and us to each other)?

Think about your relationship to the church. How can you be motivated this week to show Christ's love in community?

Split up and pray together over the relationships that come to mind. Pray that God will show His reconciliation and love through them this week.







## Week Four: Ephesians 4:1-16

Unity and Uniqueness

### Opening Questions

On a scale of 1 to 10, how has your spiritual life been the last few weeks? Why? What has made it good or bad? What themes has God been speaking to you? How can we pray for you?

### Background

While Ephesians 1-3 provides a doctrinal foundation, Ephesians 4-6 shows how to live out the Christian life in practical detail. Paul now considers the quality of life that is demanded of believers individually and in the fellowship of the church. We see a transition from the explanation of God's new society to its standards; from mind stretching theology to its down-to-earth concrete implications in everyday living.

**Read Ephesians 4:1-6.**

### Text Questions

1. What does Paul beg the Ephesians to do?
2. From verse 2, what are some characteristics of a life that is worthy of our calling? How would you define them or how are they lived out?
3. Why are these virtues so important for maintaining unity?

### Interpretation Questions

1. How do you think unity is different from uniformity?
2. Which of these virtues Paul urges do you demonstrate the best? Which would you like to see develop in your life?

Paul tells us to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in verse 3. In Greek the command implies continuous, diligent activity. Why would Paul urge the Ephesians to "make every effort" just before he makes such a strong statement about being unified?

**Read Ephesians 4:7-16.**

Summary of verses 7-10: In 2:1-10, Paul discussed *saving* grace. Here, his focus is on *serving* grace, or the grace by which these redeemed men and women serve Christ and his church.

In verse 8, Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, which describes the triumphal procession of a conquering Jewish king up Mount Zion and into Jerusalem. The king is followed by a procession of



prisoners in chains. As He marches up the hill, He is given gifts of tribute and in turn disperses gifts from His victory. Paul uses this verse to describe Christ's ascension into heaven.

The captives which follow along behind him are principalities and powers which He has defeated (Colossians 2:15). The gifts which he disperses are gifts of ministry given to His followers.

Verse 11 gives us an example of some of the gifts/graces that Jesus gives people in the Body focusing on some of the gifts that have to do with the ministry of the Word. What does it say the primary purposes of these gifts are? How would you describe the job of a pastor?

### **Interpretation Questions**

1. What is the result of all believers being equipped and serving?
2. What is something that you would like to be equipped to do for the Body?
3. What does it mean to "speak the truth in love"? How does that differ from just speaking the truth?
4. According to this passage, what is the problem with trying to live the Christian life apart from the church? In what ways do we need others?

### **Application**

Who can you speak the truth in love to this week? Who is one person who you would really like to see come to know Christ that we can pray for each week?





# Week Five: Ephesians 4:17-32

Something Old, Something New

## Opening Questions

If you were given a truth serum and asked, "How are you doing, really?", what would you say?

## Background

This study continues to talk about what it means to live a life worthy of our calling, starting by saying that we are to live differently than others.

**Read Ephesians 4:17-32.**

## Text Questions

1. Look at verse 18. What are the Gentiles afflicted with?
2. In verses 25-32, what does Paul tell us to take off? What does he say to put on?
3. What reason does Paul give for taking off or putting on these things?

## Interpretation Questions

1. How do people develop hard hearts? What are things in our lives that might indicate having a hard heart?
  - a. Ignoring the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
2. How have your attitudes and thoughts changed since you have turned your life over to God?
  - a. Think through your attitudes towards money, priorities, entertainment, dating relationships, etc.
3. How do your attitudes affect the way you live?

## Application

How can you put verse 29 into practice this week?

Of all the commands given here for Christian living, which seems to be the major command with which God is challenging you?

Pray with the person next to you over living out these commands in your life this week.





# Week Six: Ephesians 5:1-20

A Thankful Heart & Mind

## Opening Questions

Open up by summarizing the study thus far and talking about what has been challenging and encouraging this past week. See if anyone has any stories they would like to share relating to what they have learned.

**Read Ephesians 5:1-20.**

## Text Questions

1. Summarize verses 1-2.
2. What behaviors does Paul condemn in verses 3-4? Why?
3. What do verses 4 and 20 say about how we should live our lives?

## Interpretation Questions

1. What are some things that we tend to take for granted?
2. Why do you think it's often the poorest people in the world who are the most grateful?
  - a. Talk with your group about entitlement and how it impacts us when we do not receive something we believe we should.
3. What are some of the results of being ungrateful?
  - a. Cynicism is a common result. We become discontent and overly critical.
4. What are the blessings of being thankful?
  - a. Look at passages like 2 Corinthians 4:15, Psalm 69:30-31, 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

## Application

How can we make giving thanks part of our day-to-day lives? How can you express gratitude this week to God and others?

Conclude by having students write thank you notes. These can be addressed to God or someone in their lives they are thankful for.

